

Le Sueur County well-sealing efforts protect drinking water sources



Left: Le Sueur County and the city of Le Center leveraged state and local funding sources to locate and seal a municipal well in June.

Below: The well was buried several feet underneath a sidewalk adjacent to City Hall. **Photo Credits:** Le Sueur County



Three competitive Clean Water Fund grants from BWSR support Le Sueur County's well-sealing work. Watershed-based implementation funding from BWSR is also in play.

Working with partners and landowners, Le Sueur County has sealed more than 35 private, commercial and municipal wells since 2019 — an effort that protects groundwater quality.

Unused or abandoned wells can be entry points for contaminants such as nitrates and bacteria to enter groundwater sources such as aquifers. When they are in vulnerable areas — such as fields adjacent to shorelines or within Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMA) — the wells pose risks to drinking water quality.

Well-sealing is one option for preventing groundwater pollution.

“I like to call these slam-dunk projects because it doesn’t just benefit the landowner, it benefits the community, too,” said Holly Bushman, water resources manager for Le Sueur County. “These projects go a long way not just for environmental health, but for public health, too.”

The first step is often to locate abandoned wells, which don’t always appear on property records.

Then the wells can be drilled into and sealed with concrete.

Project requirements and costs vary widely depending on a well’s condition, depth, diameter and factors such as obstructions.

Bushman said residential well-sealing projects tend to be the most straightforward and affordable. Le Sueur County offers landowners up to \$3,000 per well to seal private wells. Most of the time, the county covers 100% of the cost. When a project exceeds \$3,000, landowners pay the balance.

Three competitive Clean Water Fund grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources



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— Holly Bushman, Le Sueur County water resources manager

(BWSR) support Le Sueur County’s well-sealing work. The county received \$22,000 in 2019, \$65,000 in 2023 and \$181,000 in 2025.

Sealing large industrial and municipal wells can be more costly and more complex than residential projects.

“The bigger the well, the bigger the risks (to groundwater),” Bushman said. “All of our groundwater is connected via aquifers. It’s a community-level concern.”

The county partnered with the city of Le Center on the first large-scale project, which involved sealing a municipal well drilled in 1923. The city of Le Center used a \$10,000 Surface Water Protection Plan Implementation grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) to locate the well, which was buried several feet underneath a sidewalk adjacent to City Hall.

The project started smoothly but soon hit a snag: A contractor’s equipment became stuck while drilling into the well casing. The contractor was concerned about damaging equipment, and halted work. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) required this specific well to be drilled to a depth

of 303 feet in order to be sealed; the equipment became stuck while drilling through the last 2 feet. The well also contained an obstruction, further complicating work to seal it.

Le Sueur County leveraged nearly \$59,000 in Clean Water Funds from BWSR to hire a new contractor to complete the work. The city of Le Center also contributed \$4,600 of local funds in addition to the \$10,000 MPCA grant. The well was sealed in June 2024.

The county is now working with the city of Le Sueur and landowners to locate and seal two large-scale industrial wells drilled more than a century ago to support the Green Giant canning facility, which has since been demolished.

Both wells are priorities in the city of Le Sueur’s [Wellhead Protection Plan](#) because their proximity to the Minnesota River increases the risk of contamination. One well has been located; plans for sealing are being developed. The second is in the process of being located — with assistance from Le Sueur County and technical assistance from MDH.

The second well was located in early October by the city

of Le Sueur with assistance from MDH. The well was found under an electrical transformer that serves a large portion of the city. To seal the well, the municipal transformer and corresponding electric lines will require relocation.

“The end goal is to seal them, but we’ve hit roadblocks. It’s hard to plan for these unknowns,” Bushman said. “While there have been hiccups, it’s a worthwhile thing to do. Being proactive and having a plan has been our approach.”

In addition to the competitive grants, \$31,000 in Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) from BWSR has also supported the work.

Local governments form planning partnerships to collaboratively write Comprehensive Watershed Management Plans (CWMPs) through BWSR’s One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) Program. These plans identify the highest-priority resource concerns within a specific watershed or planning area. Once BWSR approves a CWMP, the partnership becomes eligible for WBIF, which can be used for water-quality activities outlined in their plans. BWSR awards WBIF

every two years to eligible planning partnerships. Since WBIF was first awarded in 2018, BWSR has distributed more than \$146 million to planning partnerships for plan implementation.

Le Sueur County has been involved in three separate 1W1P efforts: the Lower Minnesota River East, Cannon River Watershed and the Middle Minnesota River-Mankato (currently under review). Each plan identifies groundwater protection as a priority.

“The vulnerability of drinking water elevates it as a priority,” Bushman said. “The city of Le Sueur’s DWSMA in particular is highly vulnerable.”

Bushman said the work has been successful thanks to the contributions of landowners, plus local and state partners.

“Without these partnerships, we wouldn’t have been able to do any of these projects,” Bushman said. “I think it’s really important to build those relationships that give back to the community.”

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.